7: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945) 1947

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gauged from the fact that between 1908 and 1910 the anthropologist James A. Teit was helping both the Kaska and Tahltan fight the Registered Trap-Line Act of British Columbia. The Indians strongly defended their right to trap anywhere without being limited to fixed trap lines. Their case, however, was lost. According to white informants interviewed at Lower Post, a few Indians about this time also manifested direct hostility to white men and the mysterious disappearance of one white trapper is said to have provoked investigation of some Indians.[8] 177

In 1924 the Kaska became rather widely known because of the persistent reports of witch killings that emanated from their area. In that year the body of a young Indian, Moccasin, was found in a slough thirty miles below Lower Post. The condition of the corpse suggesting murder, the matter was reported to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who in May of the same year arrived at Lower Post, found the body, and made several arrests. The report of this punitive detachment written by the Superintendent of the British Columbia Provincial Police follows. 678 ●

THE LIARD RIVER MURDER

Last spring the Department of Indian Affairs received word that a young northern Indian had been callously murdered by his fellow-tribesmen. To avoid unnecessary duplication of work and expense, Colonel R. S. Knight, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, commanding the British Columbia District, kindly arranged to have this and other matters investigated by a patrol he was sending in to the British Columbia—Yukon boundary. 676 764

In May, 1924, Inspector Sandys-Wunsch, with two Royal Canadian Mounted Police Constables, reached Fort Liard [Lower Post] via Wrangell, Alaska, and within a few days not only found the remains of Atsl, or Moccasin, a young Indian boy who had been brutally tied up and left on the ice to die, but succeeded in arresting Dan Loot,[9] Jimmy Loot, Clem Loot, Big Alec, and a woman named Edie for their share in the offense. These nomadic Indians—Nahanes of Dené stock—firmly believe in magic and witchcraft, and it is because he was suspected of this practice that Atsl was cruelly done to death. The whole conduct of this investigation reflects great credit upon the officers concerned, particularly when it is considered that the natives are singularly uncommunicative when questioned on the subject of their tribal belief.

Inspector Sandys-Wunsch, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, brought his prisoners out and they are now awaiting trial.[10]

All five Indians were tried at Prince Rupert in August 1925. Big Alec was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and the woman, a sister of the Loots brothers, received a ten years' suspended sentence. The three Loots brothers were discharged. Evidence presented at the trial suggested that 682

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[8] See also Dawson, 1887, p. 3.

[9] This family name is pronounced Loots and is so spelled in the latest census rolls. See Canada 1944.

[10] British Columbia, 1925, p. 416. See also Canada, 1926, pp. 18-19, 24.

682 "the maiming of human beings, including children, has been commonly practised amongst the Indians in the northern portion of this province . . . ."[6]

787 In June 1936 another patrol under Inspector Sandys-Wunsch assisted by Sergeant J. R. Paton was sent to Lower Post. With the party was Father E. Allard, O.M.I., en route to begin his missionary work among the Kaska. This party was cordially received by the Indians.

> All without exception were glad to see us return. The Lost family evidently bear us no malice. I must say that their stay in Vancouver [?] has done them no harm; they all were much cleaner both with regard to clothes and themselves, and present a marked contrast to the other Indians who have never been out of Liard.[7]

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754 The report of this detachment also contains a reference to witch killings that were believed to have occurred in 1930:

> A case which came under Inspector Wunsch's notice was the alleged murder half a dozen years ago of two Indian children near Porter's Landing on Dease Lake. They were orphans, the age of the elder being variously stated at 10 and 14, and the younger being 5. In 1930 they went to the woods for the winter with a party of Indians, and when the party returned in the spring the children were missing, it being stated that they had died of sickness. Later the wife of one of the Indians left him and made statements that the children had been killed, the elder one in a very cruel manner, by being tied up by the feet head down in cold weather. No motive was stated but the woman making the assertion said that she had been tied up on suspicion of witchcraft. Inspector Wunsch investigated the matter this summer. Some witnesses are dead, the accounts conflicted to some extent, the remains would be difficult to find and identify, the principal actors in the affair are old people . . . so no prosecution has been undertaken.[8]

Writing a year or two later Allard says, "The Upper Liard Indians have the reputation of being addicted to witchcraft. In times of evil or of bad luck they will suspect one or more members of their tribe as the cause of the evil which has befallen them. The suspected individuals are punished and are often done away with."[9]

INFORMANTS' DATA

754 The incidence of witchcraft was explicitly denied for the aboriginal society and a distinction was recognized between a shaman (nadita) and a witch (ˀedatî). An informant pointed out that there were only a few "Indian doctors" left at the time of the outbreaks. Nevertheless, at least in theory, a witch, like an evil shaman (or sorcerer, nato) also operated on a person's wind but the exact means by which the malevolent influence was transmitted could not be recalled.

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754 The recorded history indicates that witch-hunting occurred among the Kaska at least as far back as 1930. From informants' data it is possible to ex-

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[6] Canada, 1926, p. 34.
[7] Canada, 1937, pp. 83-84.
[8] Canada, 1937, p. 62.
[9] Allard, 1928, p. 28.

7: Honigmann E-5 (1943-1945) 1947

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tend the behavior still further in time. About 1900 when one man, Sam Bob, 674 was a small boy, his uncle heard of small children being killed around Lower 754 Post as suspected witches. In order to protect his nephews and nieces from the terror, Sam Bob's uncle took the children across the divide to the upper Pelly River. Sam Bob later heard that two or three years before this incident, or about 1897, a woman from McDame Creek, a Dease River Indian named Old Pretty, came to Lower Post where she introduced the notion of witchcraft which she had learned among the Tahltan. This woman married Captain Joe's brother, Jimmy, and gave birth to a son, Big Johnny, who had three fingers on one hand. The child became ill and subsequently Sam Bob's cousin, Atsi-so ("Soft on the side of his head"), was found at the Hyland River by three white prospectors, dead from an ax blow. This incident is believed to have been the start of the witch-fear movement and from now on witch-killings increased in frequency.

In 1916 or 1917 Teit's Kaska informant, Albert Dease, arrived in Lower Post with freight from Dease Lake. Upon arrival he heard that Casey Jones, a nine-year-old Nelson Indian youth, and two women, one of them the former Mrs. Willy Tsiga, aged about twenty, were tied up in the bush behind the settlement. In the evening, while the Indians were gambling along the river, Albert took a walk near where the Alaska Highway runs today. He heard crying and, upon investigating, discovered the three alleged witches. Albert called his Tahltan boat crew (including Beal Carlick, who is still alive and independently verified these facts) and together they cut the victims' bonds. They took the nine-year-old boy to Telegraph Creek where he remained in school for ten years.[16]

About 1923 an eight-year-old Nelson Indian boy (whose name must be 754 withheld) became suspected of witchcraft following the death of his infant brother. His experiences are given in his own words:

> Finally up to springtime my little brother got sick and they call me witch. I don't know what they mean. Mrs. Piel [i.e., Edie Louis] he tell me that. So mama believe him too; they call me that too. They tie me up. They let me hang by the foot. Oh boy, I wish they do that now! Two night I pretty near die. I heard an owl tell me, "You'll pull through." They untie me, tie me up. I don't know why they do that to me. They ask me lot of questions. Don't know what they ask me for. One time they make me go back pretty near thirty mile, back to old camp. They tell me, "You do that here, this kind of trick?" I say, "I don't know." But Old Madeleine up there; she tell me to tell them "yes." If I don't they're gonna kill me. So I believe her. So I say "Yes" to them. So we went back again to the real camp. My hand tied. My back tired traveling on the road. They guide [guard] me. I don't know what they do that for. We come home. And

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[16] According to a Tahltan informant named Beal Carlick, the Indian Agent at Telegraph Creek refused to consider seriously the reports of witch torture on the Upper Liard. Beal therefore took his report to the government agent and magistrate who, after consultation with the Indian Agent, promised to inform the Mounted Police.

754 my little brother died. And Mrs. Piel—I was laying down, blanket over my head, my hand tied back. First thing I see my ear being cut. Gonna cut my neck—she try—but she give up. Then we start. Every camp I got my hand tied my back. Throw blanket over my head. Finally—I don't know what creek—they bury my brother there—mama pull his scissors out. While Mrs. Piel cut my ear half, mama finish it. She throw my ear in the fire. I see it burning. Just think I wish I was big. We got to the post. They watch me all the time pretty bad. Lower Post, Mrs. Piel want to kill me again. I got a chance, I'm escape. And his kid, Little Charlie, his boy Sylvester, them two kids tell me, "Let's play boat." And they say, "How to witch?" I don't know what they mean. I see Mrs. Piel come with string. Sure I hid in the woods. They got the whole crowd looking for me but they never found me. Sometimes they pass me right close. When I got a chance again I beat it to other place. [My grandfather] got mad. Say, "You kill that boy I kill the whole works too." Six days out in the woods I come back. Then they left down the river. Mama change his mind. Then she stay Lower Post. I think Frank Bost, storeman, found out about me and tell Mounties.

The informant still bears the scars of his torture.

674 754 Shortly after there occurred the murder of Moccasin also in Nelson Indian territory, the Loots brothers belonging to that group. When the Mounted Police reached Little Charlie Slough they found Clem Loots camping there. The body, however, which had been previously discovered by a white man (Fred Allen, who is still alive and verified both the police's and informants' accounts of the incident) was missing. It was ten o'clock at night when the police arrived and asked Clem where the body was buried. The latter would say nothing. The next morning Allen and the police spread out and discovered the youth's grave. They began to dig and found the body wrapped in a gunny sack, the hands bound behind the back. One informant reported that a close relative of the Loots had died just previous to these incidents and the murder was apparently a consequence of this death.

When the police returned in 1926 they employed one of the ethnographer's informants as interpreter to investigate a report of a witch killing that had previously taken place at McDame Creek. This is probably the same incident mentioned in the report of 1927. Liard Tom's brother, Purdy, had married a Bear Lake (Sekani) Indian woman. They had a child, Johnny. Both parents died and, when Johnny was fourteen, Alec Chief became seriously ill. Johnny was tied up for several nights as a suspected witch. In the daytime his bonds were removed but he was fed little. When Alec began to improve the boy died. Alec had previously urged, "Save that boy, don't bother him." At the investigation our informant told the police, "All boys run trap line and stayed out twelve days in cold weather. This boy had sore leg and that made him weak and sick. When the boys come back, Johnny die." The interpreter did not deem it necessary at the time to add that the body had been deposited in a grave so shallow that a grizzly bear is supposed to have discovered and eaten the corpse.

The pattern that emerges from these reports may be briefly summarized. 679
A serious illness would overtake some member of one of the small semi-nomadic 754
bands. An effort was made to explain the illness in terms of bewitchment
and generally some child or youth of either sex was fixed upon as the 858
guilty party. Often the child confessed to the crime which he did not understand.
"Kid not smart," Sam Bob explained. "You talk to kid, 'You witch?'
Maybe say, 'Yes.' That kid big, he wouldn't speak a word." Sometimes the
confessed witch was killed or else he might starve to death. If the suspect
refused to admit his guilt he was tortured until he confessed. The commonest
means of torture seems to have been by tying up the suspected individual,
sometimes hanging him up by the heels and starving him. The remarkable [578]
thing that comes out of the data is that the captivity and torture were often
undertaken by a member of the suspect's family, again either a man or a
woman. A mature person often sought to escape the charge of bewitchment by
leveling suspicion on a child. During periods when witch-fear was prevalent [678]
people were afraid of being accused of the deed and of having guilt placed on
their children. Mutual suspicion was rife and people watched their children
carefully.

From this synthetic reconstruction it is clear that the Kaska's belief in 754
witchcraft is best described as witch-fear, since there is no evidence of any 182
Indian ever actually practicing witchcraft nor were the forms of such behavior
apparently even ideally patterned in great detail. Thus witch-fear for the
Kaska may be defined as an attempt to fix blame for malignancy upon one
person for some definite injury to another. Certain other features of Kaska
witch-fear may be pointed out. Very often it was not the supposed victim who
sought to fix this blame but his relatives and friends. Furthermore all suspicion
of witchcraft was localized within the community and often within the family.
Blame did not depend upon any previous expression of enmity between victim
and witch, for frequently suspicion fell on a child who could not easily have
originated or been the subject of such hostility. Finally there was no elaboration
of techniques for countering the attack of witchcraft. Shamanism had [755]
practically disappeared from the society and oracles were not consulted to
determine witches. The sole remedy appeared to lie in securing the confession
of the witch and/or bringing about his death. It therefore follows that witchcraft
was not a commonplace or "normal" phenomenon in Kaska society as it
is, or was, among the *African Azande* or California Yokuts and Western
Mono.*

Although Dan, Jimmy, and Chee Louis are still living in Lower Post, 754
efforts to persuade them to talk about witch-fear or witchcraft were unsuccessful.
A number of other informants expressed impatience when questioned
about this behavior and pointed out that they knew nothing of witches. They

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* Evans-Pritchard, 1937; Gayton, 1930, p. 409